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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000466

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, AF S/E NATSIOS AND AF/SPG  
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND SHORTLEY  
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

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SUBJECT: MINAWI CONSIDERS RETURN TO DARFUR AFTER ATTACK ON  
SLM HOUSE, OFFICE

Classified By: CDA Cameron Hume, Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) A force of nearly 200 police and elements of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) attacked a house inhabited by partisans of the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM)/Minawi and then raided the SLM party headquarters in the Omdurman section of Khartoum on March 24. Of the 29 SLM residents in the house--many of whom were invalids recuperating from wounds suffered prior to the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA)--approximately nine were killed, and an unconfirmed number wounded or missing. Between one and three policeman were also killed. No one was present at the SLM party headquarters when it was raided following the attack on the SLM residence. However, police ransacked the offices, took computers, and burned the party flag. The SLM reported that 46 other party members were arrested throughout Khartoum. The Interior Minister Al Zubair Bashir Taha claimed during a March 24 press conference that the police had gone to the house because of complaints from neighbors. As of March 25, Embassy staff observed that fighting had stopped and that the security services maintained a cordon in the vicinity of the house, which was peppered with bullets and rocket-propelled grenade fire.

12. (C) In a March 24 meeting with USAID Mission Director and Poloff, Senior Assistant to the President and SLM leader Minni Minawi, flanked by his inner circle, said he might return to Darfur because the situation for the SLM in Khartoum was no longer tenable. Minawi said that if he did return to Darfur he would continue to "respect the cease-fire and the DPA" and would retain his title as Senior Assistant. President Bashir, Vice President Ali Osman Taha, NISS head Salah Ghosh, and Interior Minister Al Zubeir ignored Minawi's phone calls throughout the day. He spoke to Bashir later in the evening, who told Minawi that it was inappropriate for armed groups to be in the capital and that he could do nothing to return the bodies of the victims because that "was a police matter." Minawi also met with First Vice President Salva Kiir. According to an aide to Kiir, the First Vice President raised the issue with Bashir late on March 24 and told him that the Government should cease attacks on the SLM. Minawi is scheduled to meet with Bashir on March 25.

13. (C) Minawi and the SLM leadership believe the March 24 violence to be part of a new National Congress Party (NCP) strategy to neutralize the SLM. Minawi claimed that in the last two weeks, senior NCP leaders, including Bashir, have told him that there should be no "opposition in the Palace" and that the SLM needed to support the "Government's position." For six months, the NCP has also demanded that the SLM disarm, ignoring the provision in the DPA calling for disarmament of the Arab militias prior to that of the Darfur

rebel movements. One SLM leader questioned the meaning of the March 24 actions and the NCP position. "What does this mean? Does this mean we can't have a party?" Another SLM member characterized the Government policy as wanting the SLM to "just close your mouth while they kill you." A third said that the NCP was "scheming for us to make political suicide" by demonstrating that the SLM could not even protect its people in Khartoum. A fourth questioned how the SLM could disarm when the Government would not assure its security.

¶4. (C) The SLM leaders lamented that no one, including the international community, had leverage over the NCP that could be used to restrain the hard-line elements of the regime. They said that the NCP interpreted the lack of international action to strengthen the DPA signatory movement and to respond to Government aggression as a "nod of support." "They (the NCP) think the international community doesn't care," one SLM leader stated. They said that the ruling NCP cabal thinks it can continue in power for "20 or 30 years" and that other parties are "zero." The SLM leaders suggested that the only way to address the imbalance of power was to strengthen the SLM and provide logistical support as stipulated in the DPA.

¶5. (C) Embassy officials acknowledged the SLM's decision not to escalate the situation further by sending forces to the scene and their calls for restraint among SLM commanders in Khartoum and Darfur. USAID Mission Director cautioned Minawi to consider the ramifications of a return to the field. Embassy representatives advised that he coordinate with UN Envoy Jan Eliasson and AU Envoy Salim Ahmed Salim--who are visiting Sudan--and with Kiir to articulate the types of assurances the SLM would need in order to stay in Khartoum. Minawi stated that the SLM needed the return of the bodies of those killed on March 24, provision of information on the

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whereabouts of the wounded and the detained, and guarantees of security for SLM members and facilities in Khartoum.  
HUME